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Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll

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The book *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll*, edited by Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies, represents an eclectic, creative, and challenging sweep of the broad interest of Robert Carroll—and is a most befitting memorial to him.

Sense and Sensitivity is obviously an anthology of Robert Carroll's closest friends and colleagues. The main theme is an examination of the various ways of (methodologies for) reading the Bible—a broad subject that Carroll was profoundly interested in and dedicated a huge amount of time, energy, and space to writing on himself.

Sense and Sensitivity is divided into four main sections: "Reading Robert Carroll"; "Reading Biblical Texts: Biblical Exegesis"; "Reading the Readers: Ideology and Reception of the Bible"; and "Reading the Signs: The Bible and Cultural Studies." Of course it is impossible to comment on every writer and article in the book, but one should attempt to deliver some of the flavor of its main sections.

The first section of *Sense and Sensitivity*, written by Brummitt and Sherwood, is only one article that attempts to "read" Robert Carroll himself as a human being and scholar in relation to biblical studies. It talks about the "Tenacity of the Word: Using Jeremiah 36 to Attempt to Construct an Appropriate Edifice to the Memory of Robert Carroll."

The catchphrase "tenacity of the word" echoes Carroll's own insistence that any written commentary on biblical texts must have a tenacity of integrity compelled by what the biblical text actually says. But this is not without a critical awareness of the complexities of biblical texts and any writing on them, or the "slippage" of words by their own nature

and devices, often driven by many complex conscious and unconscious motives and influences. This indeed summarized much about who Robert Carroll was and what his scholarship was about, in all their wonderful and frustrating complexity.

In commenting on the second section dealing with “Reading Biblical Texts: Biblical Exegesis,” Hunter says,

Whatever we may make of theory, of reception history, of cultural studies, of the whole crazy world of post-modernity in the biblical field, and recognizing Robert’s simultaneous suspicion *of* yet notable contributions *to* its development, one thing is clear: he never lost sight of core truth that the text itself (or texts themselves) are at the same time the starting point of all our work, the destination to which we direct that work, and the ineluctable norm against which that work should be judged. (ix)

Section 3 explores another passion of Carroll: *Ideologiekritik* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte* in relation to the politics of the guild. Indeed, Carroll was acutely aware that our reading of the Bible is not done in a vacuum, that much of what passes off as objective scholarship is indeed driven by political agendas with the purpose of religiously controlling “the masses.” Carroll despised such artificial constraint and spent much of his career as an antidote to such abuses—often at much personal cost to himself. The latter part of this section has a more direct political subject matter, namely, the debate surrounding the “history of Israel.”

The last section of *Sense and Sensitivity* deals with the Bible and cultural studies, something Carroll was very interested in. This section is, as the editors point out, the most eclectic section of the book, but mostly favoring the interface of literature with the Bible. Perhaps the most striking tribute in the fourth section comes from a dear friend of Robert Carroll, namely, Alice Bach. Carroll was an ardent supporter of the feminist movement in biblical scholarship, and yet that too was reflective of his care for humanity. For a man who was at ease out and about the streets of Glasgow, Alice Bach’s words are reminiscent and empathetic of Carroll’s concerns: “Surrounded by urban homelessness and joblessness, I wonder about the elitism of theory, the very comfort of the academy” (394).

Bach, like Carroll, is a “grounded” scholar who is all too aware of the trappings of the elitism rank in the academy. Somehow Robert Carroll never forgot where he came from and how he would have been just as content to have lived his life as a “brickie” (brick layer), which was the road he was on when the academy beckoned him.

Carroll was a champion of freedom of conscience and free speech. The bulk of his career was devoted to freeing both scholarship and society from the abuse of ideologically driven religious control. He was passionate about life in every aspect, and this drove his broad girth of interests and activities. Whatever one's opinion of Carroll and his scholarship, there can be little doubt that what drove his professional activities was a sincere concern for humanity.

As a title and a book, *Sense and Sensitivity* is a most befitting tribute to Robert Carroll in breadth of interests, complexity of subject matter, and competency of scholarship. I commend it to the readership.